



Making Great Communities Happen
**Connecticut Chapter of the
American Planning Association
Government Relations Committee**

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**POSITION STATEMENT
PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE – MARCH 18, 2013**

RAISED H.B. 6629 AN ACT CONCERNING REGIONALISM IN CONNECTICUT

INTRODUCTION

CCAPA is the Connecticut Chapter of the American Planning Association, the national organization of professional planners and citizens involved in planning for our nation's communities. CCAPA has over 450 members who are governmental and consulting planners, land use attorneys, citizen planners, and other professionals engaged in planning and managing land use, economic development, housing, transportation, and conservation for local, regional, and State governments and for private businesses and other entities. The Chapter has long been committed to assisting the Legislature and State agencies with developing and furthering responsible growth management principles.

CCAPA has a long history of providing expert professional assistance to the efforts of the General Assembly and State agencies in addressing important planning and land use issues. We have participated in and supported recent efforts to modernize Connecticut's statutes in recognition of the changing and increasingly important role of proper growth management in shaping our economic and social future.

OVERVIEW

The Committee is considering a complex proposal to redefine the organization, and to some extent the role, of regional planning organizations established pursuant to CGS § 16-4a and 4-124i. The Committee and the General Assembly have recognized the need to improve regional coordination of economic and land use planning with the adoption of PA 8-182, which required OPM to "conduct an analysis of the boundaries of logical planning regions designated or re-designated under section 16a-4a of the general statutes", and PA 10-168, which directed DECD to work with other agencies to establish "regional economic development districts".

The OPM analysis of regional planning boundaries is now due to be completed in January 2014. The comprehensive economic development strategy (CEDS) regions anticipated by PA 10-168 have been created or identified.

ANALYSIS

R.H.B. 6629 proposes to redefine regional planning boundaries and establish regional councils of governments as the administrative entity for each region. Regions are defined as the existing boundaries of the eight counties, providing border towns with an option of selecting one or the other region. The proposed bill does not address the relationship between the COGs and the CEDS, nor does it provide a rationale for using existing county boundaries to establish planning regions.

The bill also would establish a voluntary process for regional review of “projects of regional significance”, presumably with the aim of incorporating regional impacts and benefits considerations into regulatory reviews at the local level.

CCAPA POLICY POSITION ON REGIONALIZATION

CCAPA has adopted a Regionalism Policy Statement, which is attached to this testimony and which articulates the planning rationale for promoting regional planning and collaboration. As this policy statement makes clear, CCAPA strongly supports efforts to improve planning effectiveness by better coordination among all local, regional, and State planning entities.

CCAPA supports the concepts of reorganizing the regional planning organizations, providing State support for regional planning, coordinating State, local, and regional levels of planning, integrating planning across all planning areas (environment, transportation, economic, housing, agricultural, etc.), and creating financial incentives for municipal participation in regional collaboration.

Unfortunately, the proposed bill to redefine planning regions is not based on a deliberate evaluation of current conditions, strengths and weaknesses, and opportunities for improvement of the existing system. This basic planning process is necessary to ensure that any new structure is not only effective, but also trusted and supported by the participating municipalities.

CONCLUSION

CCAPA does not support the proposal for regional planning reorganization in R.H.B. 6629 at this time. CCAPA believes the professional analysis underway by OPM is a necessary step in this important decision and will provide further comment following completion of that analysis. It may well prove that the concepts are in fact appropriate; however, it may also be likely that better options are identified.

As always, CCAPA is available to assist the Committee with our professional planning expertise and first-hand knowledge of planning challenges and opportunities in Connecticut. We appreciate the opportunity to comment.

The Connecticut Chapter of the American Planning Association Regionalism Policy Statement

Organizational Objective

CCAPA supports public policies, planning objectives, and legislative actions that encourage regional cooperation and coordination on land use issues and smart growth efforts, including the revitalization of urban centers, the protection of natural resources, the optimization of infrastructure investments, and the promotion of long-term economic development.

Background

Today's global economy requires agencies and governments at all levels in Connecticut to think and act regionally in order to remain economically competitive. No single municipality can provide the infrastructure, workforce and housing necessary to attract and retain businesses that compete globally. Rather, Connecticut must develop and promote livable regions that can attract and sustain a competitive economic cluster.

In addition to its economic development benefits, regionalism helps to protect community character and shared environmental systems. It can enhance common infrastructure and transportation systems, to maximize their efficacy and efficiency. Regionalism can also achieve financial efficiencies through shared services. Addressing conservation and development at a multi-town level and across disciplines is at the foundation of many smart growth goals, including the promotion of traditional urban centers, reduction in traffic congestion and protection of natural resources.

Recognizing that certain policy issues are better addressed at a regional level, the Connecticut General Assembly enabled the creation of regional planning organizations in the 1940s. The State developed the boundaries of the current 15 regional planning organizations in the 1950s. These boundaries have changed little since their creation, despite significant changes in the State's economy and development patterns. The 2007 Legislative Program Review and Investigations Committee study of regional planning organizations found support for, and recommended that the State of Connecticut Office of Policy and Management (OPM) review the regional planning areas at least every 20 years. The lack of logical regional planning areas hinders cooperation and coordination around viable regions and the implementation of smart growth practices.

A general lack of support for regional planning further weakens Connecticut's ability to reap the benefits of regionalism. The State has steadily reduced its funding for regional planning organizations - the FY 2010-2011 budget provides only \$200,000 per year for all fifteen. While the State has created valuable incentives for municipal cooperation, the programs have been better at promoting ad hoc partnerships than lasting regional identities.

Policy Principles

In order to implement smart growth policies, Connecticut needs to define rational socio-economic regions, and foster cooperative policy, economic development, and land use efforts within those regions.

- Connecticut's regions must be defined by overlapping economic, transportation, environmental and social systems
- Regional planning must be integrated across planning areas, including land use, housing, transportation, and economic development

- Regional planning provides an important link between state-level goals and policies and local-level conservation and development concerns, and therefore must be supported by the state and municipalities and coordinated with their planning efforts
- Residents and decision-makers must be educated on the need for mutual support among rural, suburban and urban communities, to reinvest in central cities and their infrastructure, to target dense development in appropriate sites with appropriate infrastructure and transportation access, and to invest in natural resources and open space conservation
- Incentives for municipalities, ideally located in logical planning regions, to take regional approaches to economic development, land use, housing, transportation systems and service delivery must be created and supported

Legislative Recommendations

1. Review and reorganize the State's Regional Planning Organizations

Much has changed since the 1950s, when the current fifteen regional planning organizations' areas were originally defined. In order to effectively promote regionalism, the regional planning organizations' territories must be defined by current environmental, economic, transportation, and social systems. Public Act 08-182 requires OPM to conduct a review by January 2012. At the least, the Legislative Program Review and Investigations Committee's recommended criteria for logical regional planning areas should be used. The review also provides an opportunity to educate state and local officials on the important role of regional planning.

2. Renew state support for regional planning and foster a climate of regionalism

State funding is necessary to support regional planning in Connecticut. Especially as the State considers new regional planning areas based on physical, social and economic characteristics, it should also reconsider how it financially supports regional planning organizations. In addition, any state policy and/or grant incentives for inter-municipal cooperation should involve regional planning organizations in order to foster regional identities and ease opportunities for municipalities to participate.

3. Coordinate state, local and regional levels of planning

According to Public Act 08-182, OPM has to develop regulatory criteria for reviewing regional plans of conservation and development. The development of such criteria should help to establish the role of regional planning in Connecticut as a means of implementing the policy goals of the State Plan in balance with local development plans.

4. Ensure that regional planning is integrated across planning areas

The State's growth management principles and requirements for municipal plans of conservation and development require consideration of the environment, economic development, transportation and other infrastructure, housing, agricultural resources and other planning areas. Regional plans should also integrate these functions, especially as most current regional planning organizations serve as Metropolitan Planning Organizations and thereby heavily influence transportation planning. OPM's forthcoming regulatory criteria could also address this need.

5. *Create financial and other incentives for municipalities to participate in regional planning and service sharing efforts*

Build on the success of the Regional Performance Incentive Grants established by Public Act 07-239 to create incentives for, and models of, regional service sharing. Reliance on property taxes is a powerful disincentive to regionalism. Explore other means of sharing property taxes or other local revenues in an attempt to balance reinvestments in traditional urban cores and infrastructure with more rural areas.

